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ABSTRACT

The "Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do" (RIDD) reading strategy was developed based on observations of student behaviors and reading problems while completing academic tasks. The four steps of the RIDD strategy are described. To determine its effectiveness, four elementary teachers in a rural northeastern Nebraska school taught the RIDD strategy. Each teacher reported at least one student in their class who had a disability or who experienced difficulty learning. After 5 weeks, three of the four completed a survey. Results showed that all of the teachers found the strategy useful in helping students to focus on the task at hand. All teachers noted the strategy to be useful or somewhat useful in helping students find ways to solve their own problems, relieving stress involved with a difficult learning situation, assisting the teacher to demonstrate a learning strategy, familiarizing students with the concept of visual imagery, assisting students in transforming new knowledge into their own knowledge bases, and increasing students' comprehension. Two teachers noted the strategy to be very useful in helping students read the instructions of exercises, and all teachers indicated that the strategy was useful with word problems. However, in increasing students' academic performance, the strategy ranged from somewhat useful to not useful. The strategy proved effective with both special and general education students. (TD)

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Teacher Training: Providing Instruction in a Basic Reading Strategy in Elementary Rural General Education Settings

The gap between special and general education in rural areas is lessening. The reasons for this range from transportation issues, personnel development opportunities, and recruitment of qualified staff (Sebastian et al, 1997). Many general educators are constantly reading about new techniques in journals and then trying them in their classrooms in an effort to effectively serve the diverse children within their classrooms. However, as one rural teacher explained, "Some of those people must not have tried things out in a real classroom, or they certainly do have different children than I have." Using learning strategies that are considered to be in the province of predominately special education in real classrooms with general education teachers is something that needs to be studied. It is the purpose of this paper to present the findings from such a study.

The researcher developed the Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD) strategy over a three year period in a rural school in Alabama and conducted a study to determine its effectiveness in a rural secondary special education classroom. The students involved in that study experienced a statistically significant increase in academic performance in content areas in and out of the special education classroom (Jackson, 1997).

During the course of that study, general educators who also used the strategy noted that RIDD was useful in increasing the academic performance of students in the general education classroom who were not identified as students with mild learning disabilities but who did experience difficulty in learning. The students increased their grades and their academic self esteem through the use of the strategy (Jackson, 1997).

The Development of Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD)

Teachers who have been in the field of learning disabilities noticed that many students do not experience success, even when the material presented is on the appropriate reading level. The teachers often reported hearing comments such as "I can't even do this baby stuff".

In an effort to help students find ways to achieve success, the researcher observed how they performed while completing academic tasks. A number of common behaviors became obvious, particularly in the area of reading directions. First, students would stop reading at the end of a line of print, rather than at the end of the passage. This may be related to the fact that students who are young or inexperienced readers do not understand that written text is supposed to make sense (Gardner, 1991). Second, students would often scan the information to look for

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indicator words such as "circle, or "underline" without knowing *what* to circle or underline. A third behavior the researcher noticed was that students would begin a particular activity without reading the directions at all and assume that the exercise would be exactly the same as that modeled by the teacher.

Reading in content areas produced a great deal of difficulty for students with learning disabilities. Teachers noted and documented several behaviors. First, in reading, inexperienced readers have an illusion that comprehension means decoding successfully and fast (Baker, 1985). Baker further noted that young or poor readers tend to rely on lexical evaluation of a text, which is placing the main emphasis of a text on a single word rather than on the relationship of words and sentences within the entire text. The educators frequently stated that students would pronounce every word within a text perfectly, but would have no concept of the meaning within the passage. Manzo and Manzo (1993) defined reading as the act of *simultaneously* reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines. In other words, it is important for readers to reconstruct the author's basic message, reconstruct the implied message, and make judgements about the significance of the author's message. If students only read the lines, the majority of the meaning of a text is lost.

Reading in general, whether it is in history, science, literature, or math has elicited poor performance from students with learning disabilities and those who are slow learners. When students find reading a constant challenge, they do not enjoy the activity; therefore, they avoid it as much as possible. Since students in rural areas are faced with a lack of cultural and social diversity (Coleman, 1987), reading is important in providing the knowledge necessary to increase academic efficiency and knowledge of the would around them. Any skill that is not used will deteriorate. Reading is certainly no different. Some teachers noted that when students are successful on their reading level, they were less fearful of reading band began to read more often. Borkowski (1987) stated that without high self-esteem both children and adults are less likely to employ strategies for learning. As self-esteem and self-efficacy increase, the fear to use strategies decreases.

Because of the need for general education teachers to serve diverse students in rural-areas, the researcher enlisted the assistance of four general educators in a rural area in Northeastern Nebraska to further study the effects of learning strategy instruction in a general education classroom. The teachers used the same Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD) strategy used in earlier studies in the secondary setting.

Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD): Steps of the Strategy

After looking at the behaviors of students who have difficulty learning and finding some commonalities, the steps of RIDD began to emerge. Since students who are on lower reading levels than their peers often experience difficulty even within that level, the first decision was to make RIDD a strategy that would increase students' *efficiency*. When students experience success, they are likely to incorporate more efficient learning strategies.

The researcher noted that many students who have difficulty learning will read to the end of a line, rather than to the end of the passage. Therefore, the text is incomplete and the students loose the meaning. This led to the first step which is **R.** This stands for **read the passage from the first capital to the last end mark *without stopping*.** This was based on Garner's (1991) observation that rapid, accurate, and automatic decoding reduces memory demands for word identification, releasing memory resources for construction of meaning. Of course, rapid decoding is not the only key to good reading. As Garner continued, decoding does not ensure that meaning will be constructed successfully. There are certain other factors that produce comprehension failure. Anderson (1985) noted that when children who are just learning to read engage in particularly effortful, inefficient decoding, their comprehension is inevitably hampered.

Reading without stopping is important. That means that the students will need to decide, ahead of time, what they will call a word that is foreign to them. It is important to note here, that to begin this strategy, students must be at their independent level of reading. This is one area that the researcher modified for use in lower elementary grades. Since the students are just beginning to read, the teacher must model this step in every class. The teacher uses talk-a-louds before reading directions, math word problems, or sections of a reading passage and calls attention to the first capital and the last end mark of the reading material.

Good readers often skip words within a text and continue reading. Some have a "pet word" they insert, For instance, some good readers will use "Whatever", or "Big word". This may be easier than just leaving out the word. When teachers model reading aloud, they explain this ahead of time. This also lets students see that good readers do not always know all of the words. Even though in the lower grades, it is rare that a teacher will not know a word, the students are made aware that this is, in fact, a characteristic of a good reader. Very young students will not actually use this step because they do not have the background or experience to do so. The teacher, however, should model it whenever he or she reads aloud.

It is important that the students have a concept of how much will be read before it is time to stop. Actually saying, or thinking, "I'm going to read from the first capital to the last end mark" helps students to focus on the entire task rather than just one line at a time. This is especially relevant in reading directions or test items. The teacher may decide, at first, how much a student will read before going on to the next step. Then as students become more proficient that decision becomes their own.

The second step is **I.** This stands for **imagine or make a mental picture of what you have read.** This is one step of the strategy that even the youngest of learners can use. A number of researchers have examined visual imagery as a learning strategy (Hodges, 1992 Darch & Simpson, 1990; Mastropieri, 1988; Levin, 1983; Peters & Levin, 1986). They indicated that visual imagery has the potential for assisting students with learning disabilities. However, as Darch and Simpson (1990) found, visual imagery alone, when teaching rural students with learning disabilities, is not effective. Teaching explicit rules for learning information must not be ignored. Therefore, even though imagery is effective, and some times fun, it is only a part of the teaching-learning process.

When teachers read aloud, they can ask young students what they think certain characters or scenes look like. Teachers can also ask what the students think their paper will look like at the end of an exercise. This will allow students to better focus on the task at hand. Students learn quickly that the thought process is extremely fast. This also allows them to begin to conceptualize the idea that when a learning strategy is taught, once it is incorporated into the thought process, it is less cumbersome than it seems. For future strategy development, this is an important concept.

The Imagine step actually has two purposes, One is to help students focus on the concept and the other is to provide a self-monitoring procedure. Even when young learners or those who experience difficulty listen, the idea of knowing if something is understood or not is important. As Brown (1980) noted, when comprehension failure is noted, it is considered to be metacognitive success. If children do not notice that they are not understanding text information, they are unlikely to seek a strategic remedy (Garner, 1987). Using visual imagery also allows students to transform the new material into their own knowledge base. When this happens, learning is more efficient.

The third step is **D-decide what to do.** This step emerged though teaching math word problems and expanded to other areas. When students read the entire problem without stopping and had a mental picture of the situation, they decided what to do and in what order to complete the steps. In reading directions, students looked through to see exactly what they were supposed to do. In reading content areas, the students could decide to continue reading or get some help before continuing.

For teachers of young students, this step involves questioning. The teacher asks students what he or she needs to do next. Teachers guide students through several procedures they can use if they need help. This can range from asking someone for help to looking up a word in a dictionary. The procedures used for help are at the teacher's discretion and may be tailored to the specific situation.

The fourth step, **D-do the work**, also derived form teaching math word problems. It is during this step that the students actually complete the task. Often, students would attempt to read a problem and want to immediately start writing down numbers. By adding the last step, they can see that there are tings to do between reading and writing. It is interesting to note here that as students used RIDD when doing math problems, they often commented that they liked it because the only work involved was in the last step. This lends support to the idea that students with learning disabilities, and possibly those who experience difficulty, do not consider metacognitive processes important, rather, they only see the written product as evidence of successful learning.

The following report is of an ongoing study in which elementary general educators in a rural area of Northeastern Nebraska are using the RIDD strategy in their general education classrooms. There are four teachers involved. They teach first, second, third, and fourth grades. The discussion will include the methods, procedures, and results obtained over a five week period. The teachers will continue to use the strategy throughout the rest of this semester. This is a preliminary summary of their progress.

Methods and Procedures

The researcher conducted a three hour inservice for the elementary teachers in a rural school in Northeastern Nebraska. The school serves approximately 449 students in grades K -12. Only the elementary teachers attended the inservice because secondary teachers were involved in giving semester exams. Of the ten teachers who attended, four volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher did obtain the permission of the superintendent/principal to conduct the study in the school. The experience of the teachers ranged from 2 to 20 years. All of them were certified in their fields and held current Nebraska teaching certificates. Each teacher reported at least one student in her classroom who had been identified as a student with a disability or one who experienced difficulty learning.

The inservice included the following procedures: a) explaining the need for using a learning strategy, b) presenting the results of previous studies done on the RIDD strategy, c) explaining the steps of the strategy, and d) providing some modeling and training in the use of the strategy. The teachers also practiced using RIDD.

The participants began teaching the strategy at the first of the spring, 1998 school term. The lower elementary teachers predominately modeled the steps, but the teacher in the fourth grade class encouraged the students to use the strategy on their own following her explanations and modeling. After five weeks of using the strategy the teachers completed a survey about its use (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 RIDD Survey

The purpose of the Read, Imagine, Decide and Do, (RIDD) strategy is not to teach a specific subject. Rather its purpose is to allow young students and those who experience difficulty in learning to begin to think in a strategic manner. Further purposes include allowing students to become familiar with the concepts of visual imagery, the transformation of material into their own knowledge base, and to become their own problem solvers when they meet a difficult learning situation. Please honestly rate the usefulness of the RIDD strategy based on your experience with it by using the following scale.

1 = not useful
2 = somewhat useful
3 = useful
4 = very useful

The RIDD strategy was useful in the following areas:

1.	helping students focus on the task at hand	1	2	3	4
2.	helping students find ways to solve their own problem	1	2	3	4
3.	helping to relieve students' stress when faced with a difficult learning situation	1	2	3	4
4.	assisting the teacher in demonstrating a learning strategy	1	2	3	4
5.	familiarizing students with the concept of visual imagery	1	2	3	4
6.	assisting students in transforming new knowledge into their own knowledge bases	1	2	3	4
7.	increasing students' comprehension	1	2	3	4
8.	helping students to read the instructions of exercises	1	2	3	4
9.	assisting students with math word problems	1	2	3	4
10.	increasing students' academic performance	1	2	3	4

Comments

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Results

One of the teachers was unavailable at the time of the survey, but those results will be included in a future report. Of the three teachers reporting, they generally found the strategy to be somewhat useful or useful.

In helping students to focus on the task at hand, all of the teachers found the strategy useful.. For helping students to find ways to solve their own problems, one teacher found it somewhat useful. The other teachers indicated that it is useful. In the area of relieving student's stress when faced with a difficult learning situation, all of the teachers noted that RIDD is somewhat useful. As far as assisting the teacher in demonstrating a learning strategy, two of the teachers marked useful and one marked somewhat useful. Using the strategy to familiarize students with the concept of visual imagery was found to be useful by two teachers and somewhat useful by one teacher. Assisting students in transforming new knowledge into their own knowledge bases was found useful by one teacher, somewhat useful by another and not addressed by a third teacher. Two teachers found the strategy useful in increasing student's comprehension and one found it somewhat useful. Two teachers noted that the strategy is very useful in the area of helping students read the instructions of exercises; one teacher the third teacher did not respond. All of the teachers indicated that the strategy is useful with word problems. However, in increasing students' academic performance, the strategy ranged from somewhat useful to not useful (See Table 1).

Table 1-Results of RIDD Survey

	# of responses	x̄	% Usefulness
1. Helping students focus on the task at hand	3	3.00	75%
2. Helping students find ways to solve problems	3	2.67	66%
3. Relieving stress	3	2.0	50%
4. Assisting teacher demonstrate strategy	3	2.67	66%
5. Familiarizing students with visual imagery	3	2.67	66%
6. Assisting students transform knowledge	2	2.5	62.5%
7. Increasing student's comprehension	3	2.67	66%
8. Helping students read instructions	2	4.00	100%
9. Assisting students with math word problems	3	3.00	75%
10. Increasing academic performance	3	1.67	42%

As indicated in Table 1, the teachers noted a 100% usefulness in the area of helping students read instructions. This is an important skill and is one that can assist students in both completing exercises and test questions.

The teacher in the fourth grade commented that the students knew the steps of the strategy but would not apply them unless they were reminded every day in every subject and sometimes in every question. The teacher expressed concern that the students were not using it automatically.

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In strategy instruction, it is important that the students have a great deal of practice. In elementary school the purpose is to acquaint the students with metacognitive thinking. They will need to be reminded often. It may take two or three months before the students begin to internalize the strategy, especially those who are having difficulty. The benefit of this is that once this is part of the student's repertoire, he or she can use other strategies, as well as RIDD, with greater ease.

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